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THESIS

**THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA'S TRANSITION TO
DEMOCRACY: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

by

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March 2001

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**THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: POLITICAL
AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

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**Master of Arts in International Security and Civil-Military Relations -
March 2001**

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This thesis examines the democratization of the Republic of Bulgaria since 1989, the year of radical changes in the world and Eastern and Central Europe in particular.

A review of history and events since 1944 provides clues to understand the contemporary events on the Bulgarian political and social scene.

The thesis describes the major actors and agents of the changes in the country. By dwelling upon some of the major achievements of the current government in the process of democratization, as well as the progress in the development of civil-military relations in the country, the thesis suggests the way ahead for the reform of politics, society and security in South Eastern Europe and Bulgaria.

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MoD – Republic of Bulgaria
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis examines the efforts of the Republic of Bulgaria, in the period 1944-2001, towards democratization taking into account the broader scholarly body of research on democratization and its consolidation. This work analyses the impact of the socialist past (1944-1989) and the very close relations between the state and the party in the social and political life of the country after the events of 1989. The way Bulgaria was run for forty-five years, its economy, domestic and foreign policy are the best clue to understand some of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian transition to democracy in the last decade.

This thesis also examines in detail the reasons and agents of change in the country. It explains how the transition was accomplished and describes the reshuffling that took place. The thesis focuses on the changes in political and social life after 1989. It further describes and analyses the achievements of the leaders who came into power in 1997.

The thesis also identifies the evolution of civil – military relations in the country as an important element of the democratization process.

Since 1989 the Republic of Bulgaria, in South Eastern Europe has emerged from a Soviet-dominated communist system and struggles to cast off the legacy of the past until seeking to consolidate its democratic institutions, to launch economic reforms, and to promote its reintegration into Europe

The changes in political life, society and foreign policy brought on by the process of democratization were unthinkable eleven years ago. The country managed to overcome many

difficulties and steadily makes progress. Today Bulgaria is a zone of stability in a region of turmoil, sadly famous as the "powder keg" of the Balkans.

What matters are the steps the country's leaders will undertake to achieve the consolidation of democracy and to return the country to the bigger European family where it belongs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the efforts of the Republic of Bulgaria, in the period 1944-2001, towards democratization taking into account the broader scholarly body of research on democratization and its consolidation. This work describes the impact of the socialist past (1944-1989) and the very close relations between the state and the party on the social and political life of the country after the events of 1989. The way Bulgaria was run for forty-five years, its economy, domestic and foreign policy are the best clues to understand some of the peculiarities of the Bulgarian transition to democracy in the last decade.

This thesis also examines in detail the reasons and agents of the change in the country. It explains how the transition was done and describes the wide range of reshuffling that took place. The thesis focuses on the changes in the political and social life after 1989. It further describes and analyses the achievements of the leadership, which came into power in 1997.

A. THESIS ORGANIZATION

Chapter II provides the general framework of transition to and consolidation of democracy. Chapter III deals with the history of Bulgaria under communism. It further examines the key factors, elements and players on the domestic and international communist scene. Chapter IV describes the Bulgarian opposition and peculiarities of transition. Chapter V examines the political and social changes from 1995 until now. Chapter VI summarizes findings and outlines the way ahead.

B. BACKGROUND

Since 1989 the Republic of Bulgaria, in South Eastern Europe has emerged from a Soviet-dominated communist system and struggles to cast off the legacy of the past by consolidating its democratic institutions, launching economic reforms, and promoting its reintegration into Europe.¹

For forty-five years Bulgaria lived under communist leadership established by Soviet and Bulgarian communists on September 9, 1944. During the long period until 1989 one and the same person – Todor Zhivkov, who simultaneously held the position of President and First Secretary of the Communist Party (the sole Party in the state) ruled the country. There was a strong political and economic linkage between Bulgaria, the Former Soviet Union, other members of the Former Warsaw Pact, and the so-called Union of Economic Cooperation.

The unrest within the Bulgarian Communist Party after 1989 resulted in a tremendous change in the country's leadership and orientation. In the case of Bulgaria the transition started on November 10, 1989 with a palace coup within the Communist Party. This coup was the result of the efforts of the "young" generation of communists to overthrow the "old" generation as represented by Todor Zhivkov. The change was not only a matter of personalities; it was mainly a matter of ideas and orientation. Todor Zhivkov himself (like

¹J.Kim &C.Ek, 92064: *Romania, Bulgaria, Albania: Recent Developments*. Available [Online]:<
[http://www.92064.Romania, Bulgaria, Albania Recent Developments.htm](http://www.92064.Romania,Bulgaria,AlbaniaRecentDevelopments.htm). [15 January 2001]

Erik Honecker the leader of the GDR) was very much against the "perestroika" and the concepts intertwined in it. Besides he was not in a very good personal relationship with Soviet Premier Michail Gorbachev. The "new" generation with the "blessings" of the Soviet leadership started the process, which evolved into Bulgarian democratization. Bulgaria concentrated on a peaceful democratic building process in contrast to the events in Romania, where efforts focused on ending the Ceausescu regime through violence and bloodshed. In fact in the case of Bulgaria it was reform from above or as Linz and Stepan put it " A regime controlled transition to democracy."²

Another peculiarity of the Bulgarian pattern is the role of the opposition groups. Unlike Czechoslovakia or Hungary in the 1980s the Bulgarian opposition developed very late. It emerged in mid - 1989 and was mainly comprised of educated middle class - university professors, artists, scholars, and environmentalists.

The changes in political life, society and foreign policy brought on by this process of democratization were unthinkable eleven years ago. The country managed to overcome a great deal of difficulties and steadily make progress. Nowadays Bulgaria is a zone of stability in a region of turmoil, sadly famous as the "powder keg" of the Balkans. The country managed to bring together at the negotiation table and within the South East European Brigade, Greece and Turkey, two NATO member countries from the region, famous for their long lasting disputes.³

²Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.338.

³*Standard Daily*.(October 1997). Available [Online]:< <http://www.standart.com>. [01 February 2001]

Yet another Bulgarian achievement is its relations with NATO and the quest for membership in the Alliance. Throughout the eleven years of democratization the national very early stage, though, the words were not backed up by action. The UDF Government, which came into power in 1997, was the first one to undertake serious steps to this end. During the 1998-1999 Kosovo crisis Bulgaria time and again proved that it is not only a reliable partner but would also make a credible member. For example Bulgaria provided access to its airspace for the Alliance airplanes.

In December 1999 Bulgaria was invited to start the accession negotiations with the EU. In November 2000 the country was taken off of the “black” Shengen list requiring visas for the citizens of all non-EU countries when travelling to EU member states.

The country’s leaders must now concentrate on the steps required to achieve consolidation of democracy and return the country back to the bigger European family where it belongs.

C. METHODOLOGY

This thesis relies on an analytical survey of primary and secondary sources related to the domestic and foreign policy processes that resulted in Bulgaria’s transition to democracy.⁴ This study comprises a case study of Bulgaria, which provides background about the problems the countries from Central and Eastern Europe have faced while taking into account the major parameters of the process of establishing and consolidating

⁴The thesis will rely on a number of studies done by American scholars, research done by Bulgarian authors as well as unclassified government documents.

democracy. This thesis describes the difficult road Bulgaria has taken seen through the eyes of distinguished European scholars as well as Bulgarian and US experts.

II. TRANSITION AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY

Bulgaria is not yet a consolidated democracy and much has to be done to achieve this goal. A road map of what has to be achieved in the future can be provided by Larry Diamond's "*Developing Democracy Toward Consolidation*" and Juan J. Linz & Alfred Stepan's "*Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*."

The world's trend towards democratization started to gain momentum after 1974 when the Portuguese military overthrew the Salazar/Caetano dictatorship⁵ and when in 1975 the Helsinki Act was signed, which laid the basis of the democratization at large. Beginning in Southern Europe in the mid 1970s, spreading through South America, East, Southeast and South Asia at the end of the 1980s the democratization wave reached the communist countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union as well as Central America.

According to the Stanford scholar Larry Diamond "Democratization is generally a good thing and democracy is the best form of government."⁶ Dwelling upon the positive characteristics of democracy Diamond points out that governments chosen in a democratic way i.e. through free and fair elections are much better than those that are not. Historically democracy provides, by definition, better protection of human rights as compared to most totalitarian regimes. In depicting one of the most important characteristics of democracy Diamond refers to Bruce Russett, who "notes that democracies 'rarely fight each other even at low levels of lethal violence'" and they are much less likely to let their disputes with one

⁵Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p.1.

⁶Ibid., p.2.

another escalate.’⁷ Such institutionalized democracies settle their domestic issues peacefully as well. To the most viable dimensions of democracy as the best form of government, such as protection of rights to protest and organize, free flow of information, wider deliberation, debate, transparency in policy making, greater respect for law, good mechanisms to hold rulers accountable, the better protection of environment and steady progress in human well-being can also be added.

Since establishing democracy is not enough quite logically comes the issue of democracy consolidation.

Consolidation requires more than a commitment to democracy in the abstract, that democracy is ‘in principle’ the best form of government. For a democracy to be consolidated, elites, organizations, and the mass public must all believe that the political system they actually have in their country is worth obeying and defending. This robust legitimacy involves a shared normative and behavioral commitment to the specific rules and practices of the country’s constitutional system, what Juan Linz calls ‘loyalty’ to the democratic regime.⁸

Thus the indication of consolidation has three levels: elite, organizations, and mass public with two dimensions each – norms and beliefs and behavior.

To achieve consolidation all new and fragile democracies have to perform three tasks “democratic deepening, political institutionalization, and regime performance.”⁹

According to Larry Diamond the consolidation of democracy also is closely related to the political culture in a given country. He refers to five major ways through which the political culture can contribute to the consolidation of democracy.

⁷ Ibid., p.5.

⁸ Ibid., p.66.

⁹ Ibid., p.74.

One of the ways is the support for democracy-legitimacy. Legitimacy does not depend on income, education or age. It is based on the belief that democracy works well in the respective country. The other reasons for the legitimacy are the little nostalgia for the authoritarian past and the results of a good working democracy as seen in the country. "Democratic consolidation is most evident and secure when support for democracy is not only unconditional but also widely shared by all major political groups and tendencies."¹⁰

A very useful tool in democracy strengthening is explaining the support for it. The reasons for the public support for democracy are to be found in the way the system deals with the economic and social problems, the degree to which it fulfills its promise of freedom and democracy, the social structure of society and one of its most important features – education and youth.

The third factor is evaluating democracy: the role of system performance. This dimension of the consolidation is mainly tied to the economic conditions, which shape the satisfaction with democracy. "Satisfaction with democracy is strongly influenced by personal economic assessments; the greater the economic optimism, the greater the satisfaction with the way democracy is working."¹¹

The fourth important factor is the trust in democracy and more particularly confidence in institutions."The ideal democratic culture is neither blindly trusting nor hostilely

¹⁰Ibid., p.175.

¹¹Ibid., p.201.

rejecting but it is inquisitive and skeptical. What a healthy democracy must avoid is cynicism, a sweeping distrust of political and social institutions.”¹²

The last factor is internal and external efficacy.

When citizens are knowledgeable, informed and participant; when they are confident that their engagement can have some impact on political outcomes (internal efficacy); and when they believe the political system is responsive to their concerns (external efficacy) we should expect high level of support for and satisfaction with democracy.¹³

Diamond relates the consolidation of democracy to the civil society. The author argues that there are five important features of a democratic civil society: how it governs its own internal affairs; what are the goals and methods of groups in civil society; the level of organizational institutionalization; pluralism and last but not least density.

Civil society advances democracy by helping it to accomplish the transition from the authoritarian rule to electoral democracy as well as by deepening and consolidating it after democracy is established.¹⁴

By contrast civil society has a wide range of functions and mechanisms to promote democratic development and consolidation. The most important function is to provide “the basis for the limitation of state power, hence for the control of the state by society, and hence for democratic political institutions as the most effective means of exercising that control.”¹⁵ Among the other mechanisms are: supplementing the role of the political parties through stimulating the political participation and increasing the political efficacy of the

¹²Ibid., p.206.

¹³Ibid., p.208.

¹⁴Ibid., p.233.

¹⁵Ibid., p.239.

citizens; via education for democracy; by structuring multiple channels other than the political parties in order to articulate and represent the interests; via effecting the “transition from clientelism to citizenship” at the local level; by generating a wide range of interests that might cross-cut and in this way mitigate the principal polarities of the political conflict; through recruiting and training new political leaders; through civic organizations and foundations; by information dissemination and lots of others.

Although Linz and Stepan formulate in a slightly different manner the basic characteristics of democratization, they are in major agreement with Diamond concerning the characteristics of democratization. Linz and Stepan talk about completed democratic transition, which they define as :

A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about the political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.¹⁶

The transition to democracy, though, is only part of the very complicated democratization process. The next very important step in establishing an enduring democracy is its consolidation or as the authors put it when “democracy has become the ‘only game in town.’”¹⁷ Two critical aspects arise as for the completed democratic transition. First some transitions may begin but are never completed in spite of the fact that a new authoritarian regime does not come into power. Of outmost importance for a transition to

¹⁶Juan.Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p.5.

democracy is an agreement on the institutional arrangements for a democratic government. The lack of such an agreement might not only leave the transition incomplete but would also postpone the consolidation of democracy.

Consolidated democracy has three dimensions: behavioral “when no significant political groups try to overthrow the democratic regime, or secede from the state”¹⁸; attitudinal- in spite of all political and economic crises the great majority of the population believe in the democratic formulas; and constitutional-all the conflicts are resolved by laws and procedures developed in the new democratic spirit.

Linz and Stepan also believe that consolidated democracies need to have five interacting and mutually reinforcing arenas, namely: civil society, political society, rule of law, state apparatus and economic society.¹⁹

In essence the transition to democracy and its consolidation is a movement from a non-democratic to a democratic regime. Differences can exist among the polities in the paths they can take for the transition as well as the tasks they have to finish before consolidating the democracy. Although Linz and Stepan agree with the other analysts on the classification of the political system into democracy, authoritarianism and totalitarianism, they come up with a revised, much more contemporary typology comprising of: democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian and sultanistic regimes. The authors argue that since the Soviet-type systems in the 1980s, when considered how they deal and meet certain criteria like “institutional pluralism” for example, were not totalitarian, a regime type called post-totalitarian should be included to the types of regimes. A very important characteristic of post-totalitarianism is “an

¹⁸Ibid., p.5.

important ideological legacy that can not be ignored.”²⁰ Post-totalitarianism in its turn encompasses a continuum from “early-post-totalitarianism” to “frozen post-totalitarianism” to “mature post-totalitarianism.”²¹ It is characterized by a limited but not responsible social, economic and institutional pluralism, lack of political pluralism, the leadership is seldom charismatic and the personal security is heavily emphasized.

Apart from the “macrovariables” of previous regime type and stateness, democratic transition and consolidation are affected by some other important variables. There are five such variables. Two of them are actor-centered:and address the leadership of the previous non-democratic regime and the initiator of the transition. The other three are context oriented: international influences, political economy of legitimacy and coercion and constitution making environment. As for the leadership of the previous non-democratic regime four different categories of elites can be distinguished: hierarchical military; non-hierarchical military; a civilian elite and the distinctive category of sultanistic elites.

Linz and Stepan mention the following patterns in the ways to initiate a transition: an uprising of civil society; sudden collapse of the non-democratic regime; armed revolution or a non-hierarchically led military coup.²² They end with an interim or provisional government, which rules the country. There is yet another type of transitions: initiated by hierarchical state-led or regime led forces. They do not result in interim governments. A perfect example

¹⁹Ibid., p.14.

²⁰Ibid., p.48.

²¹Ibid., p.42.

²²Ibid., p.71.

of which is Bulgaria where a change of the regime from the above was done with no interim government and no elections set.

In their work the two scholars also describe the context variables, which according to them divide the international influence into foreign policies, zeitgeist and diffusion. The three ways in which foreign policies influence democratization and consolidation are: gate opening to democratic efforts an example of which is what happened in the Soviet block in Eastern Europe in 1989, subversion and helping a fledging democracy in the region to complete the democratic transition and consolidate it. Basically the authors do not believe in zeitgeist (spirit of times) but they do believe that democratically supportive zeitgeist substantially increases the chances of a country to choose democratization. The diffusion effect is very similar to the domino effect with a positive connotation only. In the presence of a tight group of countries the positive developments in one of them will spill over the others and instigate them. A good example of which are again the developments in the former Eastern Block.

Based on the theoretical background provided by Diamond and Linz and Stepan, Bulgaria is an important case study of the process of transition to democracy and the steps in democratic consolidation.

III. BULGARIA UNDER COMMUNISM

A. BULGARIA FROM 1944 UNTIL THE 1980S

There are several important dates in the history of Bulgaria. Some of them are still respected and cherished by the nation, others were a source of pride years ago but not any more.

March 3, 1878 marks an important event in Bulgaria's history. On this date as a result of the San Stefano Treaty, Bulgaria was liberated from the five century Turkish yoke and came into being as an autonomous country.

The period 1878 – 1912 was one of prosperity and progress for Bulgaria. But the country's participation in the two Balkan wars and the two World Wars resulted in defeat for Bulgaria and shattered and weak economy.

Another important date, though of doubtful value nowadays, is September 9, 1944. It marks the establishment of a new political order in which the communists gradually assumed dominance. The best key to understanding 1944 is the country's position in WWII.

As James F. Brown, Senior Fellow at the Research Institute of Communist Affairs at Columbia University, puts it in his book *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* the country had a very "peculiar" position during World War II.²³ Bulgaria sided with the Germans and declared war on Britain and the United States but not on the USSR. Regretfully this position did not manage to protect the country from the Russian invasion once the fortunes of the USSR and Germany reversed. In September 1944 after the Red Army had invaded

²³James F. Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (Praeger Publishers, 1970), p.3.

Rumania, Russia declared war on Bulgaria. At that time a three-man Regency Council ruled the country. The position of the then ruling body went through serious ups and downs:

Initially very anti-Soviet, the position of this council changed considerably when Muraviev replaced Filov as its head at the beginning of September 1944; Bulgaria now denounced the Germans and attempted to negotiate an armistice with the Western Allies. But this did not placate the Soviets, who entered Bulgaria on 8 September; in such a situation, there was little point in the Muraviev government attempting to resist the Soviet-backed Fatherland Front when it made a bid for power on 9 September, and the coup succeeded with a minimum of fuss.²⁴

The Fatherland Front that was installed on September 9 was a coalition of various anti-fascist parties with two dominating fractions: the communists and the left wing of the Agrarians. Though the communists were second only to the Agrarians account should be taken of the fact that up to September 1944 the communist membership never exceeded 30,000.²⁵

In September 1944 the communists started to establish themselves as the only power in the country. They took over Interior and Justice Ministries through which were able to suppress any opposition by the power of the State. Very soon all the opposition elements were imprisoned and some of them even executed. Thus terror became instrumental in governing the country, which regrettably was not something new to Bulgaria. Relying on terror the communists were rearranging the local government to their own advantage and subordinating all the structures to the Party.

Apart from trying to suffocate any kind of opposition the communists turned against their coalition partners in the Fatherland Front and mainly the Agrarians. In 1945 as a result

²⁴Bogdan Szajkowski, *Marxist Governments. A World Survey*, Volume 1 (The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1981), p.119.

²⁵James.F. Brown, *Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (Praeger Publishers, 1970), p.5.

of the pressure of both domestic and the Soviet communists, the Agrarians were forced to replace their old leader G.M. Dimitrov with Nikola Petkov. The communists were showing their determination to be surrounded only by like-minded people. Unfortunately Nikola Petkov did not prove to be a good choice, since he was as hostile to communism as his predecessor was. Nonetheless the communists were achieving their goals. The first serious blow to the opposition to the communists was done in 1947 when the influence of the Western Allies in Bulgaria was weakened and more so after the signature of the Paris Peace Treaty. Right after the ratification of the Treaty by the US Senate, Petkov was arrested and executed and "his death symbolized the end of tolerated opposition in Bulgaria"²⁶

The culmination of the consolidation of communism came in 1948, when the Fatherland Front at its Second Congress took a decision to build a socialist Bulgaria. Within a very short period of time all the opposition parties were disbanded and those which were loyal to the Communist party merged with it and committed themselves to socialism.²⁷

The steps undertaken by the new regime were not only in the political realm. The party actions were backed up by efforts in the economic field. In the period 1944-1947 the biggest nationalization was done. The industry and banks were under full state ownership. Because of a law passed in 1946, specifying how much land a family could own, vast areas were confiscated from some of the wealthy families and the church. At the same time the people were forced to join the co-operative farming system.

²⁶Bogdan Szajkowski, *Marxist Governments. A World Survey*, Volume 1 (The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1981), p.121.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p.121.

In 1948 at its Fifth Congress the Bulgarian Communist Party decided that Bulgaria would construct full-scale socialism. In the context of the time socialism was mainly related to production relations. To that end the first Five-year Plan was adopted. It covered the period 1949-53 but according to the reports coming from industry it was accomplished even a year earlier. The plan was mainly focusing on a change in the orientation of the industry-from light to heavy branches. During that period the largest amount of investments went for the building and developing of heavy industry. Things changed a little bit, though, in 1953, when after Stalin's death the reform process known as the New Course provided some investments for the development of other sectors like housing construction and agriculture. In that same period the collectivization of the land that started around 1947 was continued. In spite of the announced strategy of peasants voluntarily joining the collectives, encouraged by the advantages and material incentives, a great deal of the peasants were coerced to join, especially the wealthy ones. The wealthiest were called "kulaks"²⁸ and imprisoned.

1956 is a cornerstone year for the development of the Bulgarian Communist party. During the Plenum held in April, Vulko Chervenkov, the most ardent promoter and follower of Stalin's personality cult had to resign from the post of Premier. Already in 1954 Todor Zhivkov as Party Secretary had replaced Chervenkov. The demotion of Chervenkov brought a great relief among the Party members since he was arrogant and mistrustful and with no personal attractiveness. On the one hand the April Plenum opened up new opportunities for Zhivkov, who was named by the Central Committee as head of the

²⁸Ibid., p.123.

Political Bureau. Right after the Plenum the Party experienced democratization with criticism and self-criticism welcomed. The conservatives within the Bulgarian Communist Party did not like this and the regime as a whole tightened the discipline through the press and radio campaign as well as agitprop meetings. Bulgaria was proclaimed a socialist country where this regime was working. The industry was entirely nationalized and the agriculture was almost fully collectivized.

The next step in the evolution of the communist regime came in 1958 when the “Great Leap Forward, a movement which, though economic in nature, had ramifications for all important aspects of Bulgarian life.”²⁹ It was actually the essence of the approved at the Seventh BCP Congress in June 1958 Third Five Year Plan. The goals of the Plan as Zhivkov stated were not to double but to triple economic production by 1962.³⁰ This resulted in a great sacrifice and hard work for the population. No matter that the original production targets were not reached sufficient progress in the economic field was made. The government did not keep its promises about increased wages and living standards since not much could be done within two years. Furthermore the Great Leap Forward caused certain unrest among the population as well as within the Party itself. But in spite of the real, concrete figures and achievements the government in its typical style at the end of the period reported that the stated goals were realized twice as much as the initial estimates.

²⁹James.F. Brown ,*Bulgaria Under Communist Rule* (Praeger Publishers, 1970), p.83.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p.85.

The official ideology stated that Bulgaria would be transformed into an advanced socialist state by 1971; after that it would progress to develop mature socialism. According to the prognosis in 1976 the stage of mature socialism would be reached in 1990.³¹

Throughout the 1970s many changes were undertaken in the economy. Some of the important ones are the concentration of industrial management from the individual enterprise to larger associations and the creation of the agro-industrial complexes. The Party was seriously concerned about the economy and its development and improvement. This concern and desire for improvement was reflected in all Five Year Plans and all Congresses communiques.

Apart from the hard work in the economic field a lot of changes were taking place in the field of Party politics. In the beginning of the 60s Zhivkov finally managed to dispose of two of his most serious rivals – Chervenkov and Yugov. Chervenkov was seriously criticized by Zhivkov for the personality cult during the 1956 April Plenum as a result of which Chervenkov lost the Premiership. Yugov was charged by Zhivkov to have been against the Great Leap Forward. This accusation together with various crimes alleged by Zhivkov, deprived Yugov of the Premiership as well. Thus in 1962 Zhivkov was securing for himself all the important positions in the state. From 1962 to 1971 he headed the Council of Ministers. In 1971 Zhivkov relinquished this post in order to assume the presidency of the newly created State Council.

All in all it seemed that the unrest within the Party itself had settled down. Furthermore Zhivkov was very good at getting rid of those threatening his position.

³¹Bogdan Szajkowski, *Marxist Governments. A World Survey*, Volume 1 (The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1981), p.125.

Sometimes he did not even bother to give any reasons for the demotion of some of the Party functionaries as it happened with Mitko Grigorov at the Ninth Congress in 1966. While in the case of Boris Velchev, when he lost his post of Central Committee secretaryship in 1977 all the negatives were pointed out.³² In summary everybody who was a threat to Zhivkov or too ambitious was removed in due time.

B. BULGARIA IN THE 1980S

1. The Spirit of the Time

Many Bulgarians in the second half of the twentieth century knew no other ruler (but Zhivkov). With wry Bulgarian humor, many used to say during the 1980s that conditions in their country were getting so bad that they would like to go into a deep freeze for a hundred years and then thaw out and resume living. But, they acknowledged it would be pointless because Todor Zhivkov would still be in power.³³

Among all communist leaders in Central and Eastern Europe Zhivkov is the one who stayed in power for the longest time. Apart from being very skillful at “communist Tammany politics”³⁴ his longevity in power was very much due to his relations and loyalty to Moscow. In his article “Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria” published in “Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe” by Cambridge University Press, John D. Bell³⁵ states that Bulgaria during the Communist era was a rather passive country. It was the only one among the East European states, which

³²Ibid., p.127.

³³James F.Brown, *Surge to Freedom* (Duke University Press, Durham and London 1991), p.181.

³⁴Ibid., p.182.

did not go through any crisis in its relations with the Soviet Union. This was partly due to the excellent personal relationships between the leaders of the two countries. Zhivkov had good relations with Khrushchev, but his friendship and like-mindedness with Brezhnev was outstanding. That is why J.F. Brown argues that the peak in Zhivkov's leadership was in the period 1956-1982. After Brezhnev's death Zhivkov started to experience problems in his relations with Moscow. Andropov, Brezhnev's successor was less favorably disposed to Zhivkov. The tension was slightly reduced when Chernenko came into power, but to Zhivkov's regret Chernenko's rule did not last long. The beginning of Gorbachev's regime marked the end of Zhivkov's.

The changes at the top in the former USSR and the problems that Zhivkov incurred as a result, were not the only reason for what happened throughout the 1980s in Bulgaria.

In that period Bulgaria, like most countries in the former Eastern block, was overtaken by the slow-motion crisis developing through that part of the world. This had its implications on the economy as well: it became less competitive compared to the Western and rapidly developing Southeast Asian countries. There was a serious difference between the economy of 1982 and 1985. In 1985 Bulgaria's economy suffered a serious slide. The major victims were energy and agriculture. The capital and other towns were blacked out at night to ease the energy shortage. Agriculture was doing badly because of a severe winter and dry summer and the nation faced a serious food and consumer shortage.³⁶

³⁵John D.Bell is a Professor of History at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. .He is an author of numerous publications on the 19th and 20th century Balkans.

³⁶Ibid., p.183.

Furthermore the political life of the country was characterized by a total immobility because of the long tenure of Todor Zhivkov. The cultural policy became more restricted and people who earlier showed more understanding of the regime, started to lose their patience once they had to spend most of their time in shopping lines and desperately looking for consumer goods.

The economy was just one part of the equation. Other international and domestic factors added to the deterioration of the system. The country's image was seriously smudged by the attempt on Pope John Paul's life in 1981. Three years after the actual incident the member of the Turkish terrorist organization "The Grey Wolves" incriminated the Bulgarian security services and more particularly Sergei Antonov, a Bulgarian Airlines official in Rome as the actual perpetrators of that act. In 1986 Antonov was freed since his and respectively his country's guilt could not be proven. But the whole issue smeared Bulgaria's international prestige.³⁷

Still the country was facing serious internal problems, namely the ethnic minorities and more particularly the ethnic Turks. In mid 80s the regime became highly intolerant of minorities. While in the 1970es the Pomaks were forced to adopt a mainstream Bulgarian identity in 1984 the authorities under Zhivkov's directions took yet another step by launching the so-called Revival Process. The regime in Sofia believed and insisted that these people were not Turks but Turkicized Bulgarians and saw their mission as reverting them to Bulgarians. The Pomaks were suppressed in their cultural activities and forced to adopt Bulgarian names. The unbearable pressure resulted in masses of ethnic Turks leaving the

³⁷James F.Brown, *Serge to Freedom* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1991), p.184.

country and seeking settlement in heavily populated Turkish areas.³⁸ The situation got even worse in 1989 when between June and August about 315,000 Turks left Bulgaria, about 30 % of the total.³⁹ As a result of this mass exodus the Bulgarian economy was seriously harmed, but what really suffered was the reputation of the country. Although a great number of the Turks came back to Bulgaria because of the way they were treated in Turkey the damage was irreparable.

If the regime at this point in time should be characterized, reference must be made to Linz and Stepan, who define the communist rule in Bulgaria as “early post-totalitarianism,”⁴⁰ characterized by “an important ideological legacy that can not be ignored and that can not be questioned officially.”⁴¹

2. The Impact of Perestroika

Throughout his leadership, Zhivkov had always stressed his fidelity to the Soviet Union. Thus it was inevitable for him to adopt some of Gorbachev's "new thinking", though, the concept did not appeal very much to Zhivkov. In 1987 Zhivkov introduced the so-called July Concept, which was an indication that he had entirely embraced the cause of the reform. Some of the main issues in the "July Concept", outlined by Zhivkov himself, were administrative and economic reorganization, steps towards political democratization among

³⁸John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.357.

³⁹James F.Brown ,*Surge to Freedom* (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1991), p.195.

⁴⁰Juan.Linz &Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.333.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p.48

which expansion of the press freedom and experiments with multi-candidate elections, massive reorganization of local government and of the central state apparatus. The July Concept though “constituted, in fact, a shambling, incoherent document whose amateurish pretentiousness reminded suffering Bulgar-watchers of the Maoist vagaries of the Bulgarian ‘Great Leap Forward’ of thirty years before.”⁴² Furthermore the July Concept seemed to have a much greater impact in the Soviet Union as compared to that in Bulgaria itself. In October 1987 Zhivkov made a one day visit to Moscow, during which he discussed with Gorbachev the implications of the July Concept. The Soviet leader’s position was very tough. During that meeting Zhivkov was warned to watch for the leading role of the party and to control the speed and scale of the reform.⁴³ In spite of the preemptive strategy of the July Concept, Zhivkov’s undertakings were rebuked by Gorbachev.

Even more intriguing was what Gorbachev’s sharp response might have indicated in terms of Soviet and his own thinking. It was obviously inconsistent with the Mark II hands-off policy begun about the beginning of 1987. What prompted the Soviet leader, then, to break his own rule? His antipathy to Zhivkov may have had something to do with it, but- more important-it more likely indicated the threshold of Gorbachev’s political tolerance at the time.⁴⁴

Obviously Gorbachev had almost no political tolerance of Zhivkov’s initiatives, which had to be stopped. The steps Gorbachev took to this end marked the beginning of the end of Zhivkov’s political evolution. This further undermined the sclerotic regime in Sofia. Zhivkov began to lose touch with what was going on in the international scene; he was no longer able to understand all the processes. The official position of the Bulgarian regime was

⁴²Ibid., p.187.

⁴³Ibid., p.187.

unconditional support for the glasnost and perestroika, but actually it was of no consistency whatsoever. What was supposed to be perestroika Bulgarian style was debacle Bulgarian style. As far as glasnost was concerned in comparison with neighboring Rumania, Bulgaria was far better off, but compared to the Soviet Union, Poland and Hungary the Bulgarian pattern of glasnost was ridiculously narrow because of the limitations installed by Zhivkov.

There were some other factors apart from the aftermath of the glasnost and perestroika that made Zhivkov vulnerable. He became narrow, more tyrannical and corrupt. His vanity was an object of grim jokes. The printer's apprentice from Pravetz developed a mania for writing and publishing collected speeches, articles and theses. His works were published not only in the countries belonging to the Warsaw Pact but in the West as well. His infatuation of being published reached such dimensions that people in "Sofia comment that he was the only man who had ever written more books than he had read."⁴⁵

No matter that Zhivkov was in his right mind he was beginning to lose control over the situation. He still made some efforts even at the beginning of 1989 to maintain his position but in vain. He came up with Decree 56, which was envisaged to sufficiently boost the economy and thus make people give the regime yet another chance. Yet another manifestation of the fact that he had completely lost touch with reality was his determination to promote his son Vladimir. Obviously he hoped that Vladimir would replace in political life his daughter Lyudmila, who died in 1981. While Lydmila managed to make nepotism almost respectable and to a certain extent improved the image of Bulgaria through its culture, Vladimir was very much like Nicu Ceausescu. In spite of the disgust of many communists

⁴⁴Ibid., p.187-188.

and in one last attempt to prove his tyrannical character, in July 1989 Zhivkov put Vladimir in charge of the Central Committee's Commission for Culture.⁴⁶

All these events plus the openness that came with the glasnost and perestroika no matter of how small scale it was helped the need for a change to grow and mature.

⁴⁵Ibid., p.189.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.192.

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IV. THE PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIZATION IN BULGARIA

A. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

For Bulgaria the notion of democratization is not a new one. The country has legacy of establishing a democratic society and the struggle for democracy has always been a constant and recurring theme but the real process of democratization began in 1989.

Throughout the five centuries of Ottoman domination people like Vasil Levski and Hristo Botev worked for the awakening of the national identity of their fellow countrymen, who envisioned and strived to create a state that was both democratic and independent. “Vasil Levsky, ‘The Apostle’ of national rediscovery, wrote of his hope that Bulgaria would become ‘ a sacred and pure republic’ and the verse of Christo Botev, the poet-laureate of the struggle for national independence, displayed strong sympathy toward radical social and political ideals.”⁴⁷

Regretfully, since its liberation from five centuries of Ottoman domination in 1878 Bulgaria has been ruled by royal, military or Communist dictatorships, which explicitly rejected the democratic institutions as “anarchic” or “bourgeois.”⁴⁸

In spite of the circumstances the spirit of liberalism has always been alive in Bulgaria. It was implanted in the country’s lifestyle as early as the creation of the modern Bulgarian State back in 1879. During a convention held in the historic town of Veliko Tirnovo the

⁴⁷John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.354.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p.354.

delegates adopted a Constitution that provided for a Bulgaria with strict limits of monarchy and wide spectrum of civil rights.

In general the Balkans were not a productive soil for the Western type of democracy due to the lack of a middle class, economic system and low level of political consciousness among the rural majority. Furthermore in the case of Bulgaria the imported monarchs did not have any sympathy for the democratic values.

Nevertheless in Bulgaria the democratic trend has always been present on the political scene either in a more open or subtle manner. Before WWI the embodiment of the democratic spirit were the Democratic and Radical parties, supported by the intelligentsia and the professional classes, and the Social Democratic party, which supported by the civil servants and part of the working class advocated gradual reforms in a democratic context.⁴⁹ Another important player was the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union which was Bulgaria's mass democracy party aiming at attracting the peasant majority. This party managed to prove its stance after WWI with the lead by Alexander Stamboliiski government. "Stamboliiski was himself a peasant and devoted his life to the cause of the peasant's political rights."⁵⁰ Stamboliiski was in power for almost four years and worked very hard to improve the plight of the population. Among the things he did was to carry out a Land Reform, attempt to reform the legal system so that justice becomes cheaper and affordable

⁴⁹Ibid., p.354.

⁵⁰Hugh Seton Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941* (Westview Preview/Boulder and London, 1982), p.242.

for the people, and to change the tax policy so that property is distributed more fairly. In his endeavor to maintain the spirit of patriotism he introduced the Compulsory Labor Service.⁵¹

Like all leaders Stamboliiski had his faults but his death and exit from the political scene had a highly negative impact on the process of democratization in Bulgaria.

After his murder foreign policy fell into the hands of the chauvinists, and the interests of the people were subordinated to those of a small clique. The hope of Democracy in Bulgaria was buried.⁵²

During WWII some of the members of the democratic opposition joined their efforts with these of the Fatherland Front against Bulgaria's participation in the war on the side of Germany. The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union resisted the communization efforts through an Opposition Bloc under Nikola Petkov. With the failure of the Opposition Bloc in the 1946 elections and the indifference of the West to Bulgaria, the communists managed to take all the power and put an end to the democratic resistance to communization.

This particular trend lasted from 1946 until 1989, since communism and Zhivkov's regime managed to smother all the efforts towards democratization. It was at the end of 1989 when the democratic spirit and will for changes in the country were revived.

B. THE BULGARIAN OPPOSITION

The Bulgarian organized dissident movement started to rise in the late 1980s. As Linz and Stepan put it in their findings:

Our conclusion is that independently organized democratic opposition actively emerged as an effective force in Bulgaria only by mid 1989. Until

⁵¹Ibid., p.243.

⁵²Ibid., p.246

that time the Bulgarian regime in the area of pluralism approximated a totalitarian mode⁵³

Some attribut this late rise of the dissident movement to Zhivkov's approach, which was lavish to all intellectuals compliant with him. In contrast those intellectuals who did not agree with him were persecuted.

Despite the government's persecution the dissidents in Bulgaria continued the work they had started. People like Blaga Dimitrova and Radoi Ralin dared to depict the stupidity and moral backwardness of the system in written form.

Another key figure of the Bulgarian opposition is the country's best-known dissident Zhelju Zhelev. His book "Fascism," which is a comprehensive study of totalitarianism, was published as early as 1981 but was immediately suspended.

Working from a limited set of resources and without access to contemporary Western analyses, Zhelev arrived at a position similar to that reached by Hannah Arendt, Carl Friedrich, and others, that totalitarianism encompassed the experience of fascist and Communist states."⁵⁴

Encouraged by the turn of events in the Soviet Union and other East European countries Zhelev together with other intellectuals created a Club for the Support of Glasnost and Perestroika to discuss reform proposals. On 7 December upon Zhelev's proposal several members of that club formed the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)⁵⁵. The UDF was comprised of the Federation of Clubs for the Support of Glasnost and Democracy, the

⁵³Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.337.

⁵⁴John D.Bell, *Bulgaria in Transition : The limits of Idealism* (Westview Press, 1998), pp..1-2.

⁵⁵Roumen Daskalov, *Bulgaria in Transition : A Democracy born in pain: Bulgarian politics, 1989-1997* (Westview Press, 1998), p.10.

Podkrepa Independent Labor Confederation, BANU-Nikola Petkov, the Social Democrats, the Committee for Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience, and Spiritual Values, Independent Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Bulgaria and other smaller groups.

Another key organization of the Bulgarian opposition was an ecological movement “Ecoglasnost”, established in the town of Ruse. It openly challenged the regime’s indifference to the destruction of the country’s environment. The occasion, which provoked action by this group, was poison from chlorine gas emissions from Romania. Among the most outstanding promoters of that movement were politicians, sports and arts celebrities.

Following the example of the Polish Solidarity, the physician Konstantin Trenchev created “Podkrepa”, which was an independent trade union challenging the monopoly of the party-controlled unions.

Different groups aiming to promote political and religious rights and freedom were established to include the “Social Democrats” of Dr. Petar Dertliev and “BANU - Nikola Petkov” headed by Milan Drenchev.

As far as the Bulgarian opposition in general is concerned:

Many dissidents came from the ranks of the Communist Party, although in this respect Bulgaria was hardly an exception among former communist countries. It has been pointed out that Bulgaria’s small size, the concentration of potential dissidents in the capital, the café-society atmosphere and the highly personal character of relations between the few dissident intellectuals rendered the organization of secret clubs or an underground press both difficult and superfluous.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶Ibid., p.10.

In response to the undertakings of the mid 1980s, Zhivkov reverted to established methods. Those Party members, who affiliated with the dissident groups were sanctioned, dismissed from work and expelled from the Communist Party. In addition in February 1989 Zhivkov met with the intelligentsia to warn them that Bulgaria would not tolerate a negative attitude to the country and socialism.⁵⁷ But this time it was too late. The opposition did not retreat and Bulgarian dissidents continued with their activities.

Furthermore, other events contributed to the decline of Zhivkov's power. In the spring of the same year the regime was challenged by events in regions with a heavy Turkish population. Since the Revival Process in Bulgaria, the Turks had prepared an underground organization, which started to undertake a series of hunger strikes, demonstrations and clashes with the authorities. The terror directed against ethnic Turks within Bulgaria and the perceived lack of desire by authorities to address the real issues, resulted in the Turks crossing the border and finding refuge in hastily organized camps. Before the Turkish government could close the border, about 300,000 ethnic Turks had left Bulgaria.⁵⁸ The world as a whole took serious account of the unprecedented violation of human rights by the Bulgarian authorities.

C. THE POST-COMMUNIST ERA

The major events that caused and served to define the character of the post-communist era are the events of November 10, 1989, and the Round Table Talks of 1990.

⁵⁷John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.358.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p.359.

In Bulgaria the regime collapsed in a unique way. While these events in neighboring Balkan countries can be characterized as illegal, the transition in Bulgaria was within the framework of the law. In Yugoslavia the violations of the constitution of Serbia resulted in the outbreak of ethnic violence and war. Romania witnessed a managed revolution with the execution of ex-dictator Ceausescu and his wife⁵⁹ being televised. In contrast, Zhivkov's withdrawal was a peaceful event.

Different experts and analysts have different explanations of "why" and "how" Zhivkov stepped down. There is a great deal of second-guessing as to "who" was promoting this change. John D. Bell points out several reasons for Zhivkov's "retirement/removal": his erratic performance, his attempt to propel his son into the leadership, Zhivkov's poor relationship with Gorbachev, the unraveling of communist regimes across Eastern Europe.⁶⁰

This unravelling of communist regimes fits within the theoretical background of democratization as provided by Linz and Stepan. According to them this is a context variable which divides the international influence into foreign policies, zeitgeist and diffusion. The authors dwell upon the three ways in which the foreign policy influences democratization and consolidation: gate opening, subversion, and helping a fledgling democracy and zeitgeist. In the case of Bulgaria the events in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in gate opening to democratic efforts. Additionally using the author's scientific apparatus, Bulgaria was greatly influenced by the democratically supportive zeitgeist and the diffusion effect coming from the other countries.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 359.

Linz and Stepan do not specify the reasons, but characterize the events in Bulgaria as an internal party coup. This is a direct manifestation of the type of transition the authors formulate as initiated by hierarchical state-led or regime-led forces.⁶¹

There is also a difference between the experts as to “who” was the instigator. For John Bell the key figures in Zhivkov's removal were Petar Mladenov, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs since 1971 and Dobri Dzhurov, the Minister of Defense.⁶² According to Linz and Stepan the two key leaders of the party coup were Mladenov and Lukanov, the Minister of Foreign Economic Relations..

A senior staff member of the RAND Corporation and Professor of political science at the University of California, Berkley and the University of California, Los Angeles Jim F.Brown, sees the events in Bulgaria differently:

The move that overthrew Zhivkov in November was not spontaneous. A palace coup, not a popular revolt, it had apparently been in the making for about three months, the catalyst being the regime decision in May to expel the leaders of the Turkish minority, which had led to the mass exodus. The two other main conspirators (apart from Mladenov) were apparently Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov, once a protégé of Zhivkov, and Andrei Lukanov, minister of foreign economic relations, scion of a well-known communist family, who had been kept down by Zhivkov for many years.⁶³

⁶⁰Ibid., p.359.

⁶¹Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.71.

⁶²Ibid., p.360.

⁶³Jim F.Brown, *Surge for freedom* (Duke University Press, 1991), p. 196.

Still one thing is certain, the happenings in Bulgaria were with Moscow's blessings. Related, "Mladenov may have stopped in Moscow for discussions with the Soviet leaders on his way back from China."⁶⁴

What the Bulgarian population witnessed on November 10th 1989 was a meeting of the Bulgarian Communist Party Politburo at which Zhivkov "resigned". The "resignation" was accepted by the Secretariat.

People had been living under so much stress and fear that they could not believe it. "Bulgaria was indeed 'out from another yoke' as a young Sofia student joyfully put it in December 1990, referring to the freedom from the Turkish yoke achieved in 1878."⁶⁵ Even those who were struggling against the regime were mystified. As Deyan Kiyranov, one of the key leaders of Ecoglasnost puts it "I did not believe in Zhivkov's downfall until it happened and indeed for some time after."⁶⁶

Despite the efforts to make the resignation appear voluntary it soon became clear that this event was fictitious. Zhivkov's former colleagues and "comrades" accused him of personal corruption and of establishing a "totalitarian regime". His relatives and closest supporters were made to leave their posts in the Party and the state.

The Party continued to function as usual after Zhivkov's downfall and even attempted to further its hold on the transition process.

⁶⁴John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.360.

⁶⁵Jim F.Brown, *Surge for freedom* (Duke University Press, 1991), p. 197.

⁶⁶Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.336.

Shortly after Zhivkov's withdrawal and Mladenov's takeover it was not clear whether he would continue on a path of perestroika or regime liberalization. The effective protests in the country forced him to take measures towards liberalization. An initial step towards liberalization was the removal of Article One of the Constitution which declared that the communist party is the sole leading force in society.⁶⁷

Mladenov and the new leadership promised to promote and develop pluralism in the country. They stopped the persecution of ethnic Turks, inviting those who had fled the country to return and reclaim their property. They also allowed opposition groups to register as legal entities and promised to eliminate the role of the state security forces.⁶⁸

The first steps aimed at separation of the Party from the state were undertaken in early 1990 when an Extraordinary Party Congress was held. Of note issues on the Congress's agenda were structural and personnel changes.

Since political life and society are the main focus of this thesis, some important events regarding this will be mentioned. Petar Mladenov relinquished the position of Party leader and remained solely head of state. "Andrei Lukanov, widely regarded at the time as the party's ablest statesman, became Prime minister."⁶⁹ . The change of the Party's name

⁶⁷Ibid., p.338.

⁶⁸John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.360.

⁶⁹Ibid., p.360.

from "Communist" to "Socialist" was a symbol of "the Bulgarian Communist Party half-heartedly denouncing Marxist principles and Bolshevik practices."⁷⁰

Alexander Lilov, another important figure on the political scene, was elected chairman of a restructured Supreme Party Council. Lilov favored younger and better-educated leaders and denounced the past "totalitarian" practices. Lilov's ideas of Party reform and to transform it into a "Euro-socialist" Party type resulted in some dissidents to come back to the Party. However, these thoughts were not shared by all Party members. According to some the forms and changes were not enough far reaching. This criticism resulted in the emergence of other divisions of the Socialist Party, to include Nikolai Vasilev's Alternative Socialist Party, Petar- Emil Mitev's "Road to Europe". The aim of these divisions was to promote rapid democratization and to look for reconciliation with the West.

In addition to the changes within the Party after Zhivkov's fall a great number of the auxiliary to the Bulgarian Socialist Party organizations collapsed or initiated internal reforms. Many of them, such as the Komsomol, the BANU and the Trade Unions, declared their independence from the Bulgarian Communist Party control, were replaced by new organizations and elected new leadership. The Communist Party cells in the work places were disbanded or dissolved.

The State Security, specifically the Sixth Department which was focused on the domestic fight against anti-communism, was of great concern for Zhivkov's successors. Immediately personal changes followed. Colonel-General Atanas Semerdzhiev, career military, was placed in charge of the security forces. He was given a mandate to depoliticize

⁷⁰Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian University, October 1998), p.12.

and downsize the security organs. Department Sixth was disbanded altogether, the task of gathering of military intelligence was placed under the Ministry of Defense, while foreign intelligence became the responsibility of a "National Intelligence Service" under the head of state.⁷¹

During the communist regime a strong linkage existed between the Party, politics, and the military. For the officers corps Party membership was a must with promotion based on resolute affiliation.

Since one of the biggest obstacles for a democratic government is the intervention of the army in political life, the new government undertook steps for the depoliticization of the army. In contrast to previous practices servicemen were forbidden to hold political affiliations, to attend political rallies in uniform or to undertake political activities within barracks. Those officers who wished to continue to be politically active had to resign, and between 1990 and 1994, approximately 6,000 officers left the service.⁷²

Another example that the regime controlled the transition are the Round Table Talks. In January 1990 the Communist Party, the UDF and the official BANU started negotiations that resulted in a series of agreements related to political and institutional reforms. This forum had positive and negative sides.

The assessment of Venelin Ganev, doctoral candidate in political science at the University of Chicago, is highly positive.

⁷¹John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.360.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p.362.

The importance of these talks was twofold. On the one hand, this series of rule-structured meetings helped contending political elites to open channels of communication and attain a measure of mutual trust. On the other hand, this incipient consensus regarding procedures and patterns of interaction made possible the scheduling of the first multiparty elections for the Great National Assembly, upon which the outgoing legislature conferred power to adopt a new constitution.⁷³

Another achievement of the Round Table Talks was the adoption of important legislation such as The Law on Political Parties and the Election Law. The participants agreed on 18 months tenure of the Grand National Assembly (GNA). It was decided that the GNA would prepare a new Constitution while functioning as a regular Parliament. The parties also agreed to promote civilized and bloodless transition to democracy. In April that same year the national Assembly altered the Constitution to create the office of President.

Control of the transition by the BCP was evident :

Unlike the Hungarian Round Table, where the democratic opposition first held an Opposition Round Table and set out firm principles of negotiation even before they agreed to enter negotiations, in Bulgaria the preparatory meetings for the Round Table were coordinated by Andrei Lukanov, one of the Bulgarian Communist Party leaders of the coup, who 'chaired all meetings, set up the agenda and led the discussions'.'⁷⁴

Another important element of the regime-controlled transition is the election of Alexander Lilov as the Communist Party leader after the beginning of the Round Table talks in January 1990. That Lilov "was in a position 'to have total control over power and make concessions was considered by the general public as proof of transformation and

⁷³Venelin Ganev, *Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope* (Journal of Democracy 8.4). Available [Online]:< http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4ganev.html, [4 December 200], p.2.

⁷⁴Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.338.

democratization and was a powerful legitimizing factor'.⁷⁵ Bulgarian Communist Party was able to convince the population that it was not the Party but Zhivkov, who should be held responsible for the troubles of the country. Having the majority in Parliament the BCP set a date for elections in June 1990, which was much earlier than the fledgling democracy envisioned.

D. THE FORCES ON THE BULGARIAN POLITICAL SCENE

Information about the political parties in Bulgaria will be useful to understand the processes after the changes of 1989. There are many small political parties and movements but the three major political parties include the Union of Democratic Forces, The Bulgarian Socialist party and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.

1. The Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)

In March 1990 the Bulgarian communist Party, that prevailed in political life for forty-five years, in an attempt to adapt to the changes in Bulgaria and the world renamed itself to be Bulgarian Socialist party. The old name was substituted by a new one and a few personnel changes followed.

From 1989 until 1997 the BSP made efforts not only to survive but retain power as well. "Next to the Serbian Communists, the BSP was the most successful of the former

⁷⁵Ibid., p.339.

Communist Parties in preserving its influence through several changes of government.”⁷⁶ This influence can be attributed to: (a) the consolidated leadership, bound by personal ties, strong economic interests and fear to loose power; (b) the strong organization of the Party and abundant financial resources from money laundering; (c) successful strategy presenting itself as defender of the “socially weak” but “hard” electorate, specifically older people from villages and small towns, who identified the Communist Party with their social welfare and past success.

While pretending to allow a range of opinion in compliance with the general spirit of democratization, the BSP never tolerated splits in such important moments as elections and “always managed to preserve its unity and keep its parliamentary group in strict obedience...”⁷⁷

Despite the lustration laws that confiscated the property of the totalitarian organization, the BSP covered a part of its funds, transferred them abroad, and turned them over to trustworthy figures from the old economic nomenklatura. Thus the “Party leadership contains individuals from both the ‘red granny’ and ‘red cell phones’.”⁷⁸

In its quest to survive and remain in power the BSP rejuvenated the leadership, replaced some older functionaries and put forward leaders of second and third generation, many of them, like Zhan Videnov, functionaries of the youth organization. In addition for the first post-communist elections the BSP chose symbols and platforms that appealed to the

⁷⁶Roumen Daskalov, *Bulgaria in Transition : A Democracy born in pain: Bulgarian politics, 1989-1997* (Westview Press, 1998), p.12.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, p.13.

⁷⁸Venelin Ganev, *Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope* (Journal of Democracy 8.4).Available [Online]:<
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4ganev.html, [4 December 2000], p.6.

voters. In general the BSP remained among the least reformed Communist Parties of all ex Warsaw pact countries.

2. The Union of Democratic Forces (UDF)

The Union of Democratic Forces was established as a coalition of Federation of Clubs for the Support of Glasnost and Democracy, Podkrepa Independent Labor Confederation, BANU-Nikola Petkov, Social Democrats, Committee for Religious Rights, Freedom of Conscience, and Spiritual Values, Independent Association for Defense of Human Rights in Bulgaria and other smaller groups.

As far as UDF's standing on the political spectrum is concerned:

At the time of its formation, the UDF was dominated by center-left figures, usually intellectuals and former dissidents, many of whom had once been members of the BCP. But as the country made its first steps toward democratization, many new activists appeared and were farther to the right.”

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The Union was led by Zhelju Zhelev and directed by a National Coordination Council to include the leaders of the member parties and a few other activists.

Initially the leadership recruited by co-optation resulted in a lot of tension between the member parties. The structures of the UDF were weakly developed at the local level with tendency to reproduce the tensions at the center.

The characteristics of the UDF was that the anti-communist voters identified themselves not that much with the different parties within the Union but with its anti-communist image and program.

⁷⁹John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.374.

An important issue for the UDF was to determine whether it would remain a coalition of separate parties or transform into a single party. The need for unification and party discipline became explicit after UDF's losses in the 1994 elections. The 1996 Presidential election and UDF's victory in them made clear that the UDF could mute the internal conflicts and co-operate with other anti-BSP forces in favor of a single candidate.⁸⁰

Because of the coming elections a decision was imminent. In February 1997 UDF became a party, retained its broad coalition character and achieved agreement with the Democratic Party, Moser's Agrarians, Petar Dertliev's Social Democrats and some smaller groups.

3. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms is an ethnic party supported by ethnic Turks and other Islamic voters. Since its foundation the MRF has been lead by Akhmed Dogan. All attempts to break the Turkish/Islamic vote by establishing parties or fractions lead by Nedim Gendzev and Gunar Takhir failed. In Bulgaria there is a general trend towards decline of the MRF's electorate. Dogan was concerned about that decline and on the eve of 1997 elections he formed an Alliance for National Salvation, which passed the 4 percent barrier and entered Parliament.⁸¹ Today this political entity balances between the two poles of UDF and BSP.

⁸⁰Roumen Daskalov, *Bulgaria in Transition : A Democracy born in pain: Bulgarian politics, 1989-1997* (Westview Press, 1998), p.16.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p.16.

4. Other Political Parties

Many parties have emerged and are still emerging on the Bulgarian political scene. Some are so small and insignificant that are not worth mentioning. Parties such as Petar Dertliev's Social Democratic Party, Anastasia Mozer's Bulgarian Agrarian National Union and George Ganchev's Bulgarian Business Block play an important role in the political life today as they did in the early post-communist period.

In view of the forthcoming elections of 2001 new parties and movements are rising. Examples are former Minister of Interior Bogomil Bonev's "Civil Movement for Bulgaria" and the infamous Roma deputy Tzvetelin Kanchev's.⁸² "Euro Roma" movement. In addition to participation in elections and entering parliament these movements and parties attempt to break the established model of three parliamentary represented parties, to enrich the political spectrum and give the population more options to choose from. This phenomenon is indicative of the process of promotion and consolidation of democracy by civil society that is underway in Bulgaria. According to Diamond stimulating the political participation and increasing the political skill and efficacy of the citizens is one of the multiple mechanisms via which the civil society influences democratization.⁸³

E. THE JUNE 1990 ELECTIONS

In the 1990 June elections for Grand National Assembly although many of the political parties were represented UDF and BSP were the primary contestants. Today the

⁸²*Standard Daily*. (January 2001). Available [Online]:< <http://www.standart.com>. [16 January 2001]

⁸³Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p.242.

situation is the same. These elections laid the basis of a new beginning. "Perhaps most significantly these election set an enduring precedent for the orderly resolution of elite contention. Since June 1990, the ballot box has been seen, however grudgingly, as the sole route to political power."⁸⁴

The UDF started its campaign with a high level of confidence. Its presumption was that if the people were given the chance to vote freely the population would automatically reject the BSP.

The BSP was striving to distance itself from its past. BSP's spokesmen continuously denounced "totalitarianism" and stressed that Zhivkov's downfall was due to the functionaries of the Socialist Party. The old slogans and portraits of party leaders were replaced by new symbols – a red rose, a cartoon with a thumb-up gesture, and a slogan reading "Good Luck for Bulgaria". In addition BSP activists propagated among pensioners that they would be seriously endangered if UDF comes into power.⁸⁵

Despite UDF's enthusiasm BSP won the first free elections

In June 1990, the first free elections for Grand National Assembly in Bulgaria for fifty years were a disappointment for enthusiastic followers of the anti-Communist UDF, because the socialists won a significant majority. It was widely accepted that, in the week before the election, the BSP exercised considerable intimidation over the electorate, particularly over the rural constituencies, where there were hints that reformists in Sofia would be incapable of rule and would refuse to pay pensions and other benefits."⁸⁶

⁸⁴Venelin Ganev, *Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope* (Journal of Democracy 8.4).Available [Online]:<
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4ganev.html, [4 December 200], p.2.

⁸⁵John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.368.

⁸⁶Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian Univeristy, October 1998), p.12.

The UDF did win in the big cities, particularly the capital and was supported by the professionals and the younger generation.

No matter what the elections results read one thing was certain – the Bulgarians did not want to live under communism any more. This determination contributed to boost up the weak opposition which after the defeat in the elections experienced great difficulties to consolidate. “The most intense explosion of opposition in civil society occurred after, not before the election and for a while the streets seemed to displace the parliament as the center of politics.”⁸⁷

In many cities around the country and particularly in the capital Sofia were established “communist free zones” and tent cities. The strike of the students from “St. Cyril and Methodius” University in Sofia spread to the provinces. More and more the protests focused upon a statement made by President Petar Mladenov the preceding December, who in the course of a demonstration in front of the National Assembly told the Minister of Defense “ We’d better call for the tanks.”⁸⁸ In spite of the charges of the BSP and the President himself that this was a tape produced by the opposition, after the authenticity of the tape was proved Petar Mladenov had to step down. This event reduced the power and credibility of the BSP.

The next step was to appoint Mladenov’s successor. The Grand National Assembly voted several times but no one gained the necessary two-thirds majority. After some of the

⁸⁷Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.340.

⁸⁸John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.370.

nominees withdrew their candidacies in favor of Zhelju Zhelev, he became the President elect. Zhelev is the first democratic President in the contemporary history of Bulgaria. His two tenures open up a new page in the political life of Bulgaria.

F. THE PERIOD 1990-1995

The biggest reshuffling on the Bulgarian political scene took part from 1990 until 1995. Red governments were replaced by blue, they in turn were followed by expert ones. The country experienced difficulties in finding the right track. In many cases there was discrepancy between people's hopes and the practical results provided by the politicians. Instead of changes, progress and democratization the attention was focused on the past.

The Bulgarian social scientist Ekaterina Nikova describes this period thusly: 'During the whole period of 1989-1992, Bulgarian politics remained in a phase of prepolitics or antipolitics. Revolutionary rhetoric was kept alive, together with an anachronistic paranoic preoccupation with the past, the KGB, Moscow and various conspiracies'.⁸⁹

The official victory of the BSP in the June 1990 elections did not result in consolidation of the Socialist Party's power. Internal as well as external factors were working in the opposite direction. The first blow came with the election of UDF Chairman Zhelju Zhelev as President, the second factor that shattered BSP's standing in the eyes of the population was Mladenov's behavior which resulted in his resignation. BSP's Prime Minister Lukanov was not performing well either. The attacks on him were coming from within the BSP and particularly Alexander Lilov. In addition Lukanov had dragged the country into financial troubles. " He had spent the last of Bulgaria's hard currency reserves

⁸⁹Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1996), p.340.

to prevent a drop of salaries and pensions before the June elections, and when it became impossible to continue this policy, Bulgaria's economy and standard of living went into a free fall. The 'hungry winter' of 1990-91 approached."⁹⁰ The strike movements because of the unbearable conditions in the country resulted in his resignation.

In December 1990 the unallied to any political party Dimitar Popov formed a coalition government with the participation of both the BSP and the UDF.

Mladenov's and Lukanov's resignations contributed to the swing of public opinion in favor of the opposition. This support for the opposition resulted in its victory in the 1991 elections held in compliance with the new Bulgarian Constitution. Since the UDF won with a very small majority, the new UDF leader Philip Dimitrov formed a government with the parliamentary support of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms. The new government undertook measures to reinstate the property nationalized in the 1940s, to return the land to the peasants after the co-operative farms were liquidated. It passed laws aimed to encourage and facilitate foreign investments, reform of the banking system and privatisation of the industry. The people were getting poorer and poorer and "the reforms, based entirely on a monetarist approach or 'shock therapy' caused social discontent. After the MRF withdrew their support in the late 1992, the Dimitrov government fell in December 1992."⁹¹

Other reasons, apart from the harsh economic measures, contributed to the failure of Philip Dimitrov's government. The first one is the split within the Union of Democratic

⁹⁰John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in 'postcommunist' Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.371.

⁹¹Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian Univeristy, October 1998), p.13.

Forces themselves. The division between “dark blue” and “light blue” happened as early as the end of 1990. The “dark blues” “had little patience with their more leftist colleagues, whom they suspected and often accused of being communist dupes or agents.”⁹² While the “dark blues” continued to pursue their opponents, another group, comprised of intellectuals, founders of the UDF established the “light-blue” UDF Liberals. Since originally the UDF was founded with the idea of uniting different groups with various views to fight communism this split resulted in break ups in the constituent organizations. No matter that during Dimitrov’s government the UDF was more unified than before the split, the tensions within could still be felt. An example is the tense relations between the UDF government and the President who came from one and the same party. But the first democratically elected President “ Zhelev had made no secret of his sympathy toward the ‘light-blues’, the groups that had withdrawn from the UDF.”⁹³ Another example of how tight the relations between President and government were is the so called “Boyana meadows press conference” when President Zhelev publicly scolded the Parliamentary majority for being at war with everyone. He also made some personal remarks towards Stefan Savov the Chairman of the National Assembly and chairperson of one of the big coalition parties.⁹⁴

In addition some of the priorities of Dimitrov’s government were not well accepted by either some influential political forces or by the population at large. A mistake was done in the economic field for example.”The policy of ‘restitution first’ both delayed more

⁹²John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.374.

⁹³Ibid., p.379.

⁹⁴*Democratia Daily* (August 1991). Available [Online]:< <http://www.gjuvetch> [17 January 2001].

important economic reform and provoked a political reaction, for it mainly benefited Bulgarians, including emigres, who belonged to or were descended from wealthy families in the era before World War II, several of whom were UDF deputies.’⁹⁵

Dimitrov’s government was not successful in the realization of the highest priority of ”complete decommunization” either. While the prosecution of former communists like Todor Zhivkov, Prime Minister Georgi Atanasov and the Economic Minister Stoyan Ovcharov was broadly supported, some controversial measures such as denying pensions to people whose careers were in the BCP or security organs, or not recognizing the validity of any degrees earned in Soviet universities and high schools, were regarded as unfair and became highly unpopular.

After the fall of Dimitrov’s government in order to appoint a new government the President had to start negotiations with the parties represented in Parliament. First he addressed the largest group in the National Assembly – the UDF. It re-nominated Philip Dimitrov, who was no more an acceptable candidate for the BSP and the MRF. When the BSP had to nominate a candidate the MRF refused to vote for any of the BSP’s candidates. It became clear that the President would have to appoint a care taker government. The MRF put forward Ljuben Berov, a historian and economist currently taking the position of Chief Economic Advisor to the President. Berov did not belong to any party and “pledged

⁹⁵John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.379.

to lead the country out of its 'crisis of confrontation' by forming a 'government of national responsibility.'" ⁹⁶

Berov's government was formally set under a MRF mandate but his government enjoyed the support of the BSP. The major task assigned to this government was privatisation. Although it survived a great number of confidence votes in September 1994 Berov had to resign. One of the biggest flaws was privatisation.

In fact, this is when hidden privatisation started. A small number of business conglomerates with growing power started to appear, which were thought to be dominated by former Communist or secret Service officials. The conglomerates made sizeable profits from exploiting the financial weakness of the state sector. They had considerable influence among politicians, and it was assumed that they would be adversely affected if economic reforms intensified. This is why they exercised powerful influence to limit economic restructuring. ⁹⁷

In mid October 1994 Berov handed over the Premiership to Reneta Indzhova. One of the major goals of her government was to prepare new elections scheduled for December 18, 1994.

The UDF, the BSP and the MRF were the major contestants in the 1994 elections. The population was tired of the constant political insecurity in the country caused by the great turn over of governments within a very short period of time. The economic situation was bad. Bulgaria had become the country of Multigroup an organization laundering the money of the former communist party. In addition to privatisation of the biggest and most

⁹⁶Ibid., p.383.

⁹⁷Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian University, October 1998), p.14.

prosperous enterprises Multigroup started to buy politicians and ensured access to the highest levels of power.

The UDF was undermined by internal disputes and “as one deputy argued, the UDF was turning into a sect of true believers divorced from political reality.”⁹⁸

The MRF continued to loose part of its electorate, which anyway was not big, with more and more ethnic Turks leaving for Turkey. Another reason for withdrawal of support was the disappointment of the ethnic Turks with the rather lavish life style of their leader Akhmed Dogan and other members of the party elite.

While the UDF and MRF had hard times finding the right way and approach to their electorates the BSP was getting ready for its lion’s jump. At the Fortieth Congress of the BSP held in December 1991 the then leader of the BSP Lilov resigned and threw his support to thirty-two year old, former Komsomol activist Zhan Videnov. Often times youth is a virtue but not in Videnov’s case.

Until his election as BSP chairman, which came as a surprise even to himself, Zhan Videnov had a little experience with political leadership. In his initial public appearances he appeared hesitant and ill at ease. His election seemed one further step in his party’s continuing decline.⁹⁹

As far as his style and approach are concerned

As party leader, Videnov favored people like himself, building a core of young, well-educated technocrats, usually from the former Komsomol and often from the Plovdiv apparatus. Representatives of the older generation, whether reformers or conservatives, were gradually relegated to the status of backbenchers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.386.

⁹⁹Ibid., p.388.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p.389.

With new slogans about European Social Democracy and young people at leading positions BSP's chances for success in the elections had increased. Two other psychological factors added to the BSP victory in the 1994 elections. The population at large was disappointed with the UDF performance and the tough economic measures undertaken by the various governments. Related, in Bulgaria socialism was not defeated and a great number of people still believed in the socialist idea and those who promoted it.

The majority won by the BSP was called 'nostalgic' vote, with many people looking back to the times of 'stability'. It also reflected disillusionment with 'reform' associated with the UDF and its unfortunate short government in 1992, for which there was little to show except continuing economic deterioration.¹⁰¹

As a result of the BSP's victory at the December 1994 elections in January 1995 Zhan Videnov was appointed Prime Minister. Videnov's Premiership marked the beginning of the end of socialism in Bulgaria.

¹⁰¹Roumen Daskalov, *Bulgaria in Transition : A Democracy born in pain: Bulgarian politics, 1989-1997* (Westview Press, 1998), p.21.

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V. THE END OF SOCIALISM

A. THE VIDENOV GOVERNMENT

In their election campaign of 1994 “the Socialists rejected the so-called ‘right transition’ and supported the idea of the ‘left alternative’ i.e. fast privatisation, protection for the most vulnerable members of society, increase in incomes.”¹⁰²

Videnov and his government, enjoying a solid Parliamentary majority, were supposed to undertake measures in that direction. Instead of commencing serious and hard work the government was only announcing different plans and procrastinating the real reforms. The economy which so far was not well off became even worse.

By the end of 1996, Bulgaria had become the top-contender for the title ‘worst-managed country in Europe.’ During that year, inflation hit the 300 percent mark and the GNP shrank by a staggering 9 percent-making Bulgaria a dramatic exception to the general East European trend toward stabilization and growth. Between January 1996 and January 1997, the average monthly salary fell almost tenfold from \$118 to \$12, while the average pension went from \$47 to \$4 a month over the same period. Bulgaria, a land at peace, actually sank below the economic level of strife-ravaged Bosnia and Albania.¹⁰³

The Socialist government’s view on privatisation was a peculiar one. Both Berov as well as Videnov believed that the state should control all the economy’s important sectors and poured billions of leva into faltering state-owned enterprises. The new “mass

¹⁰²Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian University, October 1998), p.14.

¹⁰³Venelin Ganey, *Bulgaria’s Symphony of Hope* (Journal of Democracy 8.4).Available [Online]:<
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4ganev.html, [4 December 2000], p.5.

privatisation” schemes and “social justice criteria”¹⁰⁴ formulated by Videnov were symbolic of the anti-reformist stubbornness.

The worst damage to the economy was done by “Videnov’s circle of friends.”¹⁰⁵ It comprised of former communist-youth activists for whom the Party was a vehicle for capitalizing on strategic opportunities. They quickly transferred state resources into private hands and arranging everything by a single phone call. The access to power and national wealth brought to them on a silver plate by Videnov gave several dozen select families a life of luxury. Numerous examples can be given of how Videnov and his “circle of friends” were robbing the country and the population with the worst ones related to the export of grain and collapse of the banking system.

In late 1995, the government licensed several companies owned by Videnov’s ‘advisors’ to export unspecified amounts of grain. Several weeks later, Bulgaria was thrown into the depths of a severe grain shortage. Hungry citizens had to wait in line for hours to get meager rations of ever more expensive bread. All throughout that same year, the government had coerced the National Bank to ‘refinance’ private banks, which then extended ‘loans’ to hand picked businesses controlled by Videnov’s personal friends. Billions of leva vanished. When the inevitable collapse of the banking system ensued, in the summer of 1996, 80 percent of all personal savings were wiped out. A ‘special fund’ created by the government in order to finance the restructuring of faltering state enterprises disappeared when it was ‘discovered’ that the fund was registered under the name of one of Videnov’s ministers, who was using it as his personal checking account.¹⁰⁶

The common Bulgarians suffered from these undertakings. To survive they had to go back to the non-market forms of exchanges in kind instead of payments. In addition during

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.7-8.

that period a large-scale emigration ensued. Almost half a million departed out of 8,000,000 population in Bulgaria.¹⁰⁷ Those who “temporarily” left do not count in the statistics.

Something had to be done. The strongest opponent to the political cynicism of the BSP and Videnov’s government in particular was President Zhelev. He pointed out the organic linkage of the BSP to organized crime, appealed the governments’ legislation to the Constitutional Court, and pushed the government to unequivocally state Bulgaria’s desire for membership in NATO and the other European structures.

The criticism of Videnov’s government coming from within the BSP was gaining momentum. The tension and demands for Videnov’s resignation increased at the end of 1996 when UDF candidate Peter Stoyanov was elected President. A plenary meeting of the BSP Supreme Council gave Videnov a narrow vote of confidence, eighty-seven to sixty-nine. The majority of the high-ranking party members were unanimous that they would rather split the party than allow Videnov to continue as a Prime Minister.¹⁰⁸

The BSP was looking forward to govern the country with or without Videnov but the population was not willing to give it yet another chance. The difficult economic situation brought the Bulgarians to the brink and the population at large started rallies and demonstrations all over the country. The rallies began before Videnov’s resignation on 21 December 1996 and continued almost until the end of February 1997, when a care taker

¹⁰⁷Roumen Daskalov, *Bulgaria in Transition : A Democracy born in pain: Bulgarian politics, 1989-1997* (Westview Press, 1998), p.29.

¹⁰⁸John D.Bell , *Politics, power, and the struggle for democracy in South Eastern Europe : Democratization and political participation in ‘postcommunist’ Bulgaria* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.393.

government was appointed. CNN's correspondent Christiane Amanpour's coverage from 15 January 1997 reveals the situation in the country:

Protesters have been on the streets of Sofia for 10 straight days. Taxi drivers take their symbolic hour-long strikes to the steps of Parliament. And Bulgaria's main labor unions are considering nationwide walk outs. "Throw the red rubbish out," the demonstrators chant. They blame the ruling Socialists for continuing old Communist policies that have brought Bulgaria to the brink of economic collapse.¹⁰⁹

As a result of the mass demonstrations headed by the opposition the BSP had to relinquish. When the late Nikolai Dobrev was nominated to form the next BSP government he returned the mandate to the President for the sake of social peace and stability in Bulgaria. Then the President in compliance with the Constitution started negotiations with the second biggest party in Parliament – the UDF. The UDF appointed Sofia's mayor Stefan Sofianski as Prime Minister. The goal of this interim government, apart from the attempts to stabilize the economic situation of the country, was to prepare for the parliamentary elections held on 17 April 1997. These elections were a sweeping victory for the UDF. Ivan Kostov, leader of the UDF, became Prime minister.

B. DEMOCRATIZATION AT FULL SPEED

In his pre-election campaign Kostov had three major priorities: 90 percent privatisation by the end of the year, applying for membership in NATO and EU as well as state withdrawal from the economy.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Christiane Amanpour, *Bulgaria, January 1997*, Available [Online]: <<http://cnn.com>. [January 19, 2001]

¹¹⁰ Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian University, October 1998), p.14.

The nation needed a strong and determined government to take it out of the debacle of the previous years.

With the elections of April 1997, Bulgaria has entered a period of hope and recovery. The newly installed government headed by UDF leader Ivan Kostov has seemed fully determined to navigate the troubled ship of Bulgarian democracy safely through the treacherous currents and eddies of reform. A Currency board has been instituted with a view to strengthening fiscal discipline. Inflation has been tamed. There has been a sustained effort to curb organized crime and to put notorious crime figures behind bars. Full membership in all European structures (including NATO) has gone unambiguously to the top of the foreign-policy agenda.¹¹¹

The first order of business of the new government was a very clear picture of where should the country stand within the four years of its tenure. Of note the conditions in Bulgaria were more favorable than ever. For the first time since 1989 the country is run by a President, Prime minister and Parliamentary majority from one and the same political party with common beliefs and values. They were fully supported by the population in free and fair elections, which Diamond points out as one of the most important characteristics of democracy.¹¹² This was a practical step towards completed democratic transition when “the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.”¹¹³

The changes in Bulgaria started as early as 1989 but only after the elections in 1997 the major efforts to consolidate democracy began slowly though steadily.

¹¹¹Venelin Ganey, *Bulgaria's Symphony of Hope* (Journal of Democracy 8.4).Available [Online]:<
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v008/8.4ganey.html, [4 December 2000], p.8.

¹¹²Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p.3.

¹¹³Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.3.

Shortly after coming into power in 1997 the UDF government set its agenda – Program of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria 1997 – 2001, or the so-called Program 2001.¹¹⁴ It provides the Government's visions on important issues such as the future of the country, institutional building of democratic Bulgaria and order and security for the Bulgarian citizens. The document also focuses on the place and role of the country in the world and its integration into the European and Trans-Atlantic security structures. The largest portion of Program 2001 deals with the financial and economic reform of Bulgaria, describing in details what will be done for the financial stabilization, structural reform and revival of the Bulgarian agriculture together with all the other important trends in the economic field. The Government focuses a great deal of its efforts on the social policy and the health of the nation as well as education, youth, preservation of the nature and the Bulgarian spirit.

After many years of imitations of reforms now there is at least a chance Bulgaria to take the right way and get back to normal life in the broadest sense of the word. We, the Ministers of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria, take that high responsibility before all Bulgarians, before our children and ourselves.¹¹⁵

This Program of the Government is also an essential step towards consolidating democracy, because it realizes the three tasks of each fragile democracy “democratic deepening, political institutionalization, and regime performance.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴Program of the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria. Available [Online]:<Government of the Republic of Bulgaria.htm, [19 January 2001]

¹¹⁵Ibid.

¹¹⁶Larry Diamond , *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press,1999), p.74.

As a result of the government's focus on macro-economic management under international supervision encouraging results were achieved. The yearly inflation was reduced to one-digit numbers, the national currency was kept fixed to the German Mark, and salaries and pensions, as well as the economy as a whole started to grow. The government also committed itself to an accelerated privatisation process. By closing several loss-making state-owned enterprises the sympathy of Western financial institutions was won. "Foreign direct investment (FDI) during 1997 totalled \$ 502 million, or nearly 39 % of the 1.293 billion FDI since 1992."¹¹⁷

The support of the Western financial institutions is only a part of the equation. This step contributed to the consolidation of democracy via one of its essential tools – evaluating democracy. According to Diamond the satisfaction with democracy is strongly linked to the personal economic assessments, the higher and the better the economic perspectives the greater the satisfaction and support with democracy.

The two major foreign policy issues of the current government are membership in NATO and the European Union.

The country was late in declaring its will to join the Alliance, making this statement in 1997, and in spite of the fact that Bulgaria was not among the invited in the 1995-1999 round of NATO Enlargement the leadership did not give up. A number of measures were undertaken by the Government as a whole and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense in particular to achieve the goal of membership. Apart from introducing amendments to the Defense Bill which are reflecting the new realities, for the very first time a Military Doctrine

¹¹⁷ Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Charles Graybow, *Nations in Transit 1998* Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London, 1999), p.175.

and a National Security Concept were developed and adopted. The military started a process of downsizing taking into account that there is no threat for the security and stability of the country and to meet NATO membership requirements. From a total of 110,000 the Bulgarian armed forces in the year 2003 would be 45,000.¹¹⁸ Related, efforts are done to achieve interoperability with the NATO armies in communications and language training.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been proactive in promoting Bulgaria's initiatives aimed to improve the stability in the Balkans. The regular meetings and good personal relations between the experts and the ministers from the region contribute to this end.

As an example of its commitment to strengthen the stability in the Balkans and as a proof of its desire to join the Alliance, Bulgaria participated in SFOR and is now taking part in KFOR as far as it can afford it financially. During the 1989-1999 Kosovo crisis the country not only provided NATO planes with access to its airspace, but provided food and shelter for the refugees in Radusha refugee camp, located in neighboring Macedonia.

In terms of EU membership Bulgaria is taking steps to boost up its economy and bring various aspects of its legislature into accordance with European Union standards. While the membership in NATO seemed much closer, the chances to join the EU were much feeble. As a result of the hard work and determination of the government in December 1999 Bulgaria was invited to start the accession negotiations. The words of Prime Minister Kostov were indicative of how the future events would unfold.

After the invitation to start the negotiation we should not stop working. We should not forget that for the Bulgarians the very invitation for EU membership does not change their lives. In order to make a difference, the

¹¹⁸Military Doctrine of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Government, now that the invitation is a fact, has to pursue other goals, which would attract investments and help the people feel the difference.¹¹⁹

Aiming to improve the work of the state apparatus and to prepare the country for the prospective membership the Prime minister made changes in the government and replaced ten ministers. In addition the government continued to work on the privatisation, to curb criminality and to align the country's legislation to that of the EU. Apart from these measures, as Foreign Minister Nadezhda Mihailova states, the government has done a lot of lobbying.¹²⁰ The results followed suit. An year later, on 1 December 2000 the EU Council of Ministers decided to take Bulgaria out of the "black" Schengen list and no more require visas for Bulgarian citizens when they travel around Europe.

This current government has achieved a lot but its success with the EU membership is among the outstanding ones. The EU membership is demanding effort and yet much has to be done. In spite of the hard work ahead this successful endeavor of the government contributed to the strengthening of democracy by increasing the confidence in the institutions, which is an important factor of consolidating democracy, the way Diamond sees it.¹²¹

The support for and trust in the institutions is also demonstrated in the polls that are often done in the country. According to these polls among the leading most trusted

¹¹⁹Democratzia Daily, 325/10/12, *Interview of Prime Minister Kostov*, Available [Online]:<<http://www.digsys.bg/bgnews>.[20January 2001]

¹²⁰Democratzia Daily, 303/01/12, *Interview of Minister of Foreign Affairs Nadezhda Mihailova*, Available [Online]:<<http://www.digsys.bg/bgnews>.[20January 2001]

¹²¹Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p.206.

institutions are the Presidency, the Council of Ministers and the National Assembly, followed by the Armed Forces.¹²²

Today, due to the work the UDF government has done and the results it had achieved, democracy is legitimate. It enjoys a country wide support of the population, and the people are absolutely confident that it is working in Bulgaria. In addition there is no nostalgia for the authoritarian past. This is in compliance with one of the important factors in consolidating democracy, as described by Diamond.”Democratic consolidation is most evident and secure when support for democracy is not only unconditional but also shared by all major political groups and tendencies.”¹²³

The stable political situation in the country, the strive towards improving the economy, hence increasing the living standard of the population, as well as the variety of amendments to already existing and developing new laws, further relate to the three dimensions of a consolidated democracy as seen by Linz and Stepan, namely behavioral, attitudinal and constitutional¹²⁴

In summary it can be said that now “democracy has become ‘the only game in town’”¹²⁵ in Bulgaria, since the processes are irreversible and there is no way back.

¹²²Standart Daily, December 2000, Available [Online]:< <http://www.standart.com> [01 February 2001]

¹²³Larry Diamond , *Developing Democracy, Towards Consolidation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press,1999), p175.

¹²⁴Juan Linz &Alfred Stepan , *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.5.

¹²⁵Ibid., p.5.

The UDF should hopefully continue its good work more over the 2001 Parliamentary elections will be held this coming June.

The good civil – military relations in the country contributed to the afore mentioned results and achievements. Because of their significance the following subchapter describes the evolution of civil – military relations in Bulgaria.

C. CIVIL – MILITARY RELATIONS

Since “civil-military relations as one of the indicators and factors for the consolidation of democracy in the national and international societies”¹²⁶ are of great importance, this thesis should focus on that particular domain.

The issue of civil-military relations can be broken into three intertwined fields: democratic control, civil-military relations and defense reform.

Of note, in the case of Bulgaria the motivation for working civil military relations and implementation of democratic control, is the integration of the country in EU, WEU and NATO, as well as the rule of law.¹²⁷

The first steps toward changes in the field of civil military relations were taken as early as 1991, with the Soviet civil-military system as point of departure, but their real improvement started in 1997 after the UDF government came into power.

¹²⁶Plamen Pantev, The new national Security Environment and its Impact on the Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria (ISIS, 1997), Available [Online]:
<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isis/Publications/Pantev_New_National_Security_Environment_.htm. [01 February 2001]

¹²⁷Ibid

Account also should be taken of the fact that in the case of Bulgaria efficient civilian control over the military is a key prerequisite for good civil-military relations. The first reason is that the military not only in Bulgaria but in general is very conservative, a closed society, relatively isolated from the population. Second the Bulgarian military are highly reluctant to accept any changes. Partly this is due to the fact that before 1989 the military were the “spoiled child” of society and enjoyed a number of privileges ranging from high salaries to low cost governmental housing. Quite naturally they perceive any move towards a change as a threat to their status quo. The Bulgarian military in the beginning of the 1990s were also very unwilling to accept a civilian leadership in a domain, which they considered initially as their own.

The year 1991 is important for the development of the civil-military relations in Bulgaria since then the first civilian Minister of Defense was appointed in more than 50 years. For the very first time civilians were entering the Ministry of Defense and were taking key, leadership positions. With a new democratic government, that came into power in 1991, and a civilian Minister of Defense the defense establishment of the country was on its way of reforms. In the period 1992 –1994 several drafts of a new Defense Bill, reflecting the changes in the world and the country and their impact on the military were developed. In 1995 a new Defense Bill was adopted. In the following years further amendments were made to that Defense Bill. A major contribution to that has the democratic government that came into power in 1997. The amendments are related to the role of the civilian Minister of Defense, who gained broad authority over the General Staff¹²⁸

¹²⁸Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria, *Information package, October 1999*

The institutions of utmost importance for the functioning of the civil – military relations in the Republic of Bulgaria, in hierarchical order, are the President, the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly as a representative of the legislature through its National Security Committee, the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff.

The head of state is the President¹²⁹ who is also a commander-in-chief of the armed forces; he declares mobilization and state of war. As the highest-ranking official in the state he is authorized to appoint and dismiss the higher command of the Armed Forces on a motion from the Council of Ministers.¹³⁰ In 1991 the President created a Military Cabinet to help him in his duties as a Supreme commander. Under the Petar Stoyanov presidency a former Chief of the General Staff became one of his advisors. In the last years the importance of such a Cabinet was apparently increased since it provides the President with a team of experienced professionals who have a high level of expertise in the military area. A substantial reinforcement to that team in terms of experience and expertise is Gueorgui Ananiev, who was a Minister of Defense since February 1997 till December 1999. Now he is a special advisor to the President on defense issues.

As a chairman of the Consultative National Security Council, which includes the Ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Interior, their deputies and the Chief of the General Staff, the President has the right to possess and to require from the state institutions any information he deems necessary, that is related to the national defence and security.

Both the Constitution and the Defense Bill have chapters outlining the presidential prerogatives as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. The Defense Bill repeats the

¹²⁹*Constitution of the Republic Bulgaria*, Art. 92(1)

basic text of the Constitution that the President is a Supreme Commander-in-chief,¹³¹ but also adds several important rights. For example the President is entitled to approve strategic plans for the activities of the Armed Forces, to declare a higher level of readiness for some specific units or for the whole Armed Forces.¹³²

The National Assembly, being the legislative power has fundamental functions in the national security area and plays an important role in the functioning of the civil-military relations in the country through its structures and more particularly through the National Security Committee. The rights of the National Assembly are stated in the Constitution. It is the only institution, which can declare war and make peace. It is the body that allows the use of the Armed Forces outside the country, it permits the stationing of foreign troops on Bulgarian territory or their passing through it, it also ratifies international treaties in the field of defense and security, and of course has the right to declare a state of emergency.¹³³ It determines the total number of the Armed Forces, under motion of the Council of Ministers. The Parliament adopts the National Security Concept and the Military Doctrine, and is authorised to establish or close military academies and schools.¹³⁴

The Parliament approves the defense budget as part of the state budget and has the right to question the Minister of Defense on various topics, which is a very important tool of

¹³⁰ Ibid., Art. 100(2)

¹³¹ *Defense Bill*, Art. 27-30 State Gazette, Number 112, Sofia, 27 December 1995.

¹³² Ibid., Art. 28.

¹³³ *Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*, Art. 84 , Art. 85.

¹³⁴ *Defense Bill*, Art. 26

civilian control. Every Friday there are hearings in the Parliament and very often the Minister of Defense is among those answering the questions of the MPs from the different political parties.

Attached to the Parliament, the National Security Committee was created in 1991 with the aim to provide parliamentary control over the Armed Forces. Its members are MPs who work on the drafts of the defense bills and make evaluation reports on national security issues.

The Council of Ministers is responsible for the public order and national security and exercises overall guidance of the state administration and the Armed Forces.¹³⁵ According to Article 32 of the Defense Bill the government determines and implements the defense policy and is in control of the defense spending and the use of the allocated defense budget. It approves and adopts the plans for the build-up and organisation of the Bulgarian Armed Forces. It also adopts the Rules for Professional Military Service, an Act, prescribing the rights and obligations of the professional military personnel. The last amendment to the Defense Bill in 1997 gave to the Government wide prerogatives in terms of sending unarmed troops outside the territory of the country for humanitarian, educational, or other peaceful mission. It is much better compared to the previous practice when decisions were taken on a case by case basis.

Among its various obligations the Government has to present an annual report on the Defense and Armed Forces status.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ *Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria*, Art. 105

¹³⁶ That was a part of the 1997 amendments on the Defence and Armed Forces Law - Art. 32a.

The Council of Ministers contributes to working civil-military relations through appointing a civilian Minister of Defense, who is a member of the Government and coordinates his activities with the Cabinet.

The Defense Bill¹³⁷ stipulates that not only the Minister but also his deputies should be civilians. As of today there are four Deputy Ministers of Defense: the first one is responsible for the defense budget, the second deals with the human resources issues, which means that he is directly working on the personnel policy of the Ministry, the third one is responsible for the military-economic bloc and last but not least is the deputy minister for defense policy and plans and international cooperation. They all assist the Minister of Defense in his day to day obligations and work and share the burden of running the defense establishment. The Minister of Defense is in charge of the implementation of the Government policy in the armed forces and has the full control over the General Staff. His functional duties and authorities as well as those of his deputies and the Chief of the General Staff are stipulated in Defense Bill.

In the course of the last five years the process of appointing civilians to key positions in the Ministry of Defense continued. The idea was to establish a civilian structure in the Ministry which is representative of the executive power and is in compliance with the Law on State Administration adopted in 1999.

In view of implementing civilian control over the military the personnel of the Ministry of Defense is almost twice bigger, than those working for the General Staff

¹³⁷ *Defense Bill* (Adopted 22 December 1995, Amended 16 December 1997), Art. 34 (2) and (3).

In the General Staff priority is given to the military personnel and almost all key positions are taken by military, which improves and contributes to the civil-military relations within the defense establishment, since these people coordinate their actions, work together on a daily basis and learn from each other.

The Chief of the General Staff, who is appointed by the President under ministerial motion, is responsible for the day to day leadership of the Army. He has no political powers. He signs ministerial orders, related to the Armed Forces. His duties are stated in the Defense Bill and are related to the organisational building, preparation and maintaining of the mobilisation readiness of the Bulgarian Army as well as the participation of the Bulgarian Army units in peacekeeping, humanitarian, rescue, and other operations outside the national territory.¹³⁸

Article 74 of the Defense Bill clearly states that the Chief of Staff is directly subordinated to the Minister of Defense. The Defense Bill, amended in 1997 also stipulates that the rotational principle should be applied in appointing the Chief of the General Staff. The tenure is three years with a chance for a second term and the Chief of the General staff is appointed among representatives of the Air Force, Navy and the Army.¹³⁹

Account should also be taken of the efforts made by the leadership of the Ministry of Defense in view of improving civil-military relations. On the one hand are the endeavors to educate and train more civilians on defense issues, so that they have a better understanding of the way the military mechanism functions. On the other hand is the training

¹³⁸Ibid. Art. 76.

¹³⁹Ibid. Art. 75 (Amended 19 December 1997)

and education of the military, which helps them understand the need of civilian control and the clues to well functioning civil-military relations. This education and training is done through participation in workshops and seminars, organized by institutions and countries with well established traditions in that particular aspect.

Apart from that in 1999 two studies were conducted, dealing with aspects of the civil military relations. The first one was a result of the request of the then Bulgarian Minister of Defense addressed to Defense Secretary Cohen for assistance in studying the civilian oversight over the military. The study was conducted by a joint US-Bulgarian team lead by Major-General Kiefenaar. In the course of 1999 the US team visited Bulgaria several times and had meetings with all the key factors in the implementation of the civilian oversight over the military, which is one of the preconditions of the civil-military relations. They had several meetings with the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, the National Security Committee in Parliament, as well as talks and discussions with experts from the MoD and the GS. During one of their visits to the country they traveled around and visited a number of military facilities and talked to a great number of officers and conscripts. Such a study was not done before. It was the first of its kind. The results of the study and the recommendations were presented in a Report, which in July 1999 Secretary Cohen handed to the then Minister of Defense. The findings and recommendations of the report were of great help in defining the size of the Armed Forces, and will be of great help in the work aiming to improve the functions of the two institutions most explicitly representing the civil military relations, namely the MoD and the GS.

Another study conducted in the country was done by the DMSC of the UK Ministry of Defense. It has to do with the integrated structure of the Ministry of Defense and the General Staff. The report of the study was ready in March 2000. The Bulgarian institutions have still a lot to learn. This study contributes to a better organization of the structures, finding the right balance between them, as well as getting rid of the duplicating ones. Moreover the UK MoD has the best experience and expertise in working in an integrated civil-military structure.

Based on the expert advice of these two studies and the expertise the Bulgarian MoD and GS have gained so far they are continuing the work to permanently establish the parameters of civil-military relations, which will sufficiently contribute to and improve their work.

In summary:

Both society and its military are much closer to the realization of the so called "liberal bargain", speaking in the terms of Prof. Joseph Nye, the former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs of the United States. This "bargain" is supposed to define in a stable way the specific rights and responsibilities for the military and for the civilian leadership. The contents of the evolving bargain is the recognition by the military that they are accountable to the rule of law, agreement to remain nonpartisan and respect civilian authority. On the part of the civilians - they must respect the special role of the military in society as long as the military profession is needed by society, must provide an adequate funding for the respective and mutually agreed appropriate military roles and missions. A common obligation is expected to be the education of both military and civilians in such a way that they can interact positively with each other for the benefit of the society and the state.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰Plamen Pantev, The new national Security Environment and its Impact on the Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria (ISIS, 1997), Available [Online]:
<http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isis/Publications/Pantev_New_National_Security_Environment_hm.[01 February 2001]

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VI. CONCLUSION

For forty-five years the Bulgarians had had a difficult life as a result of the communist regime installed on September 9, 1944. The Communist party, closely linked to the state, extensively developed relations with the other communist countries - members of the former Warsaw Pact and mainly with the former Soviet Union. The country had to go through Stalin's personality cult, tight political discipline and more or less low living standard.

Because of the mentality of Todor Zhivkov, who ran the country for thirty-five years, his excellent personal relationships with the Soviet leaders and more particularly Michail Gorbachev and last but not least due to Zhivkov's subservience, for decades Bulgaria was considered an indivisible part of the former Soviet Union in terms of foreign policy and economy.

Luckily the changes that took place in the world had their impact on Bulgaria as well. The Communist party coup on November 10, 1989 and Zhivkov's resignation opened new vistas for the nation. The country slowly but steadily took the path of democratization, which by no means is an easy one.

Within eleven years Bulgaria had had three Parliaments and eleven Governments. Some of them lasted only few months, others a little bit longer. Some of them did a lot of good for the country, others brought a lot of unrest and poverty. A great deal of reshuffling and a lot of ups and downs characterize the political life in that period, but what really matters is that

In fact, within a very short period the country experienced changes without precedent in its history, and in a completely peaceful way. A breakthrough was made in Bulgaria's international isolation. And, with the savage ethnic

conflicts on her western border, Bulgaria has earned a reputation as an 'island of stability' in the Balkan Peninsula.¹⁴¹

The will and determination of the country and its 1997 government to join the world values of peace, security, stability and prosperity as represented by NATO and the EU undoubtedly define the focus of the efforts. A lot has been done and yet still has to be done so that Bulgaria becomes an equal partner in these organizations.

Bulgaria is also working hard to improve the security, stability and confidence in the region. The country more and more plays the role of "security zone" on the Balkans. A case in point is the participation of Bulgaria in the Multinational Peacekeeping Forces, which are a product of the joint efforts of the countries in the region.

Bulgaria also sufficiently contributes to the implementation of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which in addition to providing funds for the revival of the region contributes to the security, transparency and confidence in it. Within the framework of this initiative the country chaired the SEE Coordination table.¹⁴²

Right now Bulgaria enjoys a political consensus like never before. The politicians as well as the population are becoming more and more aware that "democracy is the only game in town."¹⁴³ The country has working institutions, its economy is progressing, and its image with the international financial institutions has been improved.

¹⁴¹ Darinka Asenova, *Bulgaria in Transition: Socioeconomic and Political Changes* (Glasgow Caledonian University, October 1998), p.25.

¹⁴² George Katsirdakis, Lecture at Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 30 January 2001.

¹⁴³ Juan Linz & Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.5.

Bulgaria nowadays is peaceful and politically stable. Hopefully things will continue in the same mode and direction after the forthcoming elections in June 2001 because this is the right path. The story of Bulgaria, which those days more and more takes its role and place in the big European family, will very soon be a successful one.

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